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## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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*The Problem of the Commonwealth.* By LIONEL CURTIS. Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, Ltd., 1916. 8vo, pp. xii+248. \$1.50 net.

The problem of closer organization of the British Empire is probably the most interesting and certainly one of the most important of all the matters now pressing for settlement. The war has emphasized the anomalous position of the self-governing Dominions as partners with the mother-country in the consequences of the imperial government's foreign policy and yet without a voice in determining that policy. Sir Robert Borden, prime minister of Canada, has stated that "the great policies and questions which concern and govern the issues of peace and war cannot in future be assumed by the people of the British Islands alone," and all thoughtful men and women recognize that changes must take place in the status of the Dominions with reference to the foreign affairs of the Empire. As to the extent of those changes, however, there are wide differences of opinion. Many people are unwilling to interfere, as they think, with the gradual process of evolution. Imperial relations have been regarded in the overseas Dominions and in the mother-country as something sacred and inviolate, and even today there is much hesitation and misgiving about "tinkering" such relations instead of leaving the problems and difficulties to work out their own solution. It marks a distinct advance that even a few suggested plans outlining such changes advocated are being offered for the consideration of the public by men of recognized ability and standing. Hitherto the imperial problem, so called, has been treated largely as an academic question. The war has brought it into the realm of practical politics.

*The Problem of the Commonwealth*, by reason of its able statement of the imperial problem in the light of war experiences and its definite scheme for solution of that problem, as well as the peculiar standing of the writer, is an important, even epoch-marking, contribution to the literature of Empire relationships. Its proposals are attractive in their idealism, and the perfect form of the machinery of government advocated, but they are too dogmatic, too revolutionary, and so much opposed by existing prejudices and predilections as to be quite impracticable as an

immediate reform. Nevertheless, Mr. Curtis' statement of the problem demands attention, and the significance of the volume cannot be disregarded.

In the preface Mr. Curtis explains how the book came to be published at this time. He recalls that in 1910 groups of men representing all the more important schools of political thought were formed in various centers in the self-governing Dominions for the purpose of studying the imperial problem. Additional groups were organized subsequently in the United Kingdom and other parts of the Empire. They became known as "Round Table" groups, the name being adopted from the quarterly magazine published by them. Mr. Curtis says:

The task of preparing or editing a comprehensive report on the problem was undertaken by the present writer. Preliminary studies were distributed to the groups for criticism, and their criticisms, when collected, were printed and circulated for their mutual information. In the light of these criticisms, instalments of the report were prepared and printed for private circulation as each was finished. It presently appeared that any attempt to treat the subject in all its essential aspects would fill several volumes. Shortly before the war, therefore, it was decided to prepare a brief separate report on one single aspect of the imperial problem, that raised by the question *how a British citizen in the Dominions can acquire the same control of foreign policy as one domiciled in the British Isles*. A draft was prepared and widely circulated for criticism in the autumn of 1915, and in view of this criticism the text has now been substantially revised. The result is the present volume, which aims merely at showing what in the nature of things are the changes *which must be made* before a British subject in the Dominions can acquire self-government in the same degree as one domiciled in the British Isles.

Part I of the main report, which reveals the foundations upon which the conclusions addressed in *The Problem of the Commonwealth* were based, has recently been published under the title, *The Commonwealth of Nations*.

As to his own exclusive responsibility for the argument of the book under review, Mr. Curtis states:

The shorter report is now given to the public on the sole responsibility of the writer himself, because no other way was apparent in which it could be submitted to their judgment. Throughout he has worked in the light cast by the many-sided criticisms of the "Round Table" groups, whose numerous members reflect every shade of opinion. Without these materials the report could never have been written in its present form; but the writer himself has, of necessity, had to decide what to reject and what to accept. He has no

authority for stating, therefore, that the report represents any opinion but his own. The best materials, indeed, have often been furnished by colleagues who would hesitate to accept his conclusions as a whole or even in part.

This is not a mere formal expression of modesty on the part of Mr. Curtis. There are influential members of the "Round Table" in Canada, and presumably elsewhere in the Empire, who believe that serious harm has been done to the cause of effective reorganization of the Empire by the well-intentioned but ill-advised publication of *The Problem of the Commonwealth*.

The author says his main contention is "that Dominion electorates must, in the not distant future, assume control of foreign affairs, yet cannot do so without deciding irrevocably whether they are to keep or to renounce their status as citizens of the British Commonwealth." Following an introductory chapter in which he urges that the commonwealth must be revised after the war and revised in accordance with the principle of self-government, Mr. Curtis reviews briefly the origin and growth of self-government in England and in America and the development of responsible government in the British colonies after 1783. He finds that control of commerce, tariffs, and immigration has been shown by experience to belong to the sphere of Dominions, and not to that of imperial, jurisdiction. But self-government in the Dominions, although sufficient for the purpose of realizing their nationhood, is still incomplete. In practice, the imperial government has left the people of the Dominions to control every one of the interests which they, through their parliaments, have finally insisted upon controlling. But there have been a number of cases in which powers of self-government demanded by the Dominions have not been conceded and have not been finally insisted upon by the Dominions. All such matters have involved foreign relations, and final insistence, under present organization, would have disrupted the Empire. In any real crisis of foreign affairs Mr. Curtis contends that the imperial conference is not available as a means of co-operation between the Dominions and the mother-country. The imperial problem, then, resolves itself to this: How may the Dominions assume the burden of the whole of their affairs and yet continue as part of the British Empire? Mr. Curtis' statement of that problem is able and convincing.

Part II deals with the conditions of the solution of the problem as the latter is presented in Part I. Mr. Curtis is concerned only to discover the *most moderate* measure of change which would give the people of the Dominions the same responsibility for their foreign affairs as the people of Britain. He rejects, as unworkable, the proposal to trans-

fer the control of foreign affairs to an imperial executive responsible not only to the parliament of the British Isles, but also to the parliaments of the Dominions. The proposal to open the imperial parliament to representatives from the self-governing Dominions is likewise found unsatisfactory, because one ministry cannot be answerable to two different majorities and electorates. Mr. Curtis' plan contemplates a separation of the local and the imperial jurisdictions now exercised by the parliament of the British Isles, giving the United Kingdom a national government of its own, "the counterpart of the national governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa," and reserving to a new Imperial Parliament, truly representative of all the Dominions and the mother-country, jurisdiction in all matters strictly and necessarily imperial. This would involve no change in the constitutions of the Dominions, but for Great Britain the change would be great, indeed. The writer insists that the control of India, Egypt, and the crown colonies, which are not yet ready for self-government, is inseparable from foreign affairs and must be assumed by the new Imperial Parliament, thus making the Dominions jointly responsible with the mother-country for the domestic as well as the foreign affairs of such dependencies. Mr. Curtis says that the cabinet of the new Imperial Parliament should number, at most, eight men with the following offices: the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary for War, the Secretary for India, the Colonial Secretary, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Munitions, each of the Dominions having a minister in such cabinet. Mr. Curtis urges that the imperial problem as he has stated it cannot be solved by effecting the necessary changes one by one. There can be no intermediate period. The minimum conditions which he has stated must be fulfilled. He therefore defends his proposals against the charge of being too definite. The Anglo-Scottish union, he says, was the result of a cut-and-dried scheme, and it is impossible for people living under two or more separate governments to create a common government for common purposes by any mere process of growth. He urges an imperial convention to draft an agreement along the lines indicated, capable of submission to each parliament or electorate concerned.

Mr. Curtis' plan is admirable in theory and, because of the remarkable experience of the writer in the affairs of the British Empire and his connection with the "Round Table" members, deserves careful consideration. It may well be, however, that he has neglected certain political considerations and prejudices which would militate powerfully against the adoption of such a scheme. Certainly in Canada—and

the same seems to be true of other parts of the Empire—not many people will agree with the detailed solution which he presents. Already strong Canadian Imperialists have taken issue with him and substitute suggestions are being offered. Mr. Z. A. Lash, of Toronto, has just published a small book challenging Mr. Curtis' scheme at extremely important points, and outlining what he believes to be more moderate proposals. The problem of the commonwealth probably will not be solved in the manner urged by Mr. Curtis. The solution must be evolved and developed by an imperial conference only after much study and discussion. There are so many conflicting interests to be harmonized that to take a definite scheme before such a conference would be to insure its rejection. The argument of Mr. Curtis is too dogmatic, too specific, too detailed, and too rigid. But his statement of the problem before the Empire could not easily be improved upon, and out of the welter of argument and controversy which his book has evoked there will come a deepened interest in the problem and a better realization of its tremendous importance.

The question of reorganization of the British Empire presents many matters of special interest to the political economist. Plans for such reorganization are no longer based upon trade preference, but rather upon military and naval defense. Mr. Curtis and his critics are agreed that in matters of control of commerce, tariffs, immigration, etc., the Dominions must retain complete autonomy and be free from any interference or domination. Nor must the central authority, however constituted, in any way decide the incidence of taxation in connection with the assessment upon the partner Dominions for the purposes of common defense. The amounts agreed upon must be provided by the governments of the Dominions themselves, by policies determined entirely by the parliaments of such Dominions. Only in case of default by any Dominion must the central authority be able to collect the revenues due from the taxpayers of the defaulting Dominion themselves, *in the last resort*, by distraining on the goods of such taxpayers. In the matter of apportionment among the several Dominions of the cost of the Imperial Parliament and the functions which it performs, Mr. Curtis bases his calculations on an estimate of "the taxable capacity of the average citizen in each Dominion," which he multiplies by the population of that Dominion to get "the resultant ratio of taxable capacity." He would leave the whole question of "taxable capacity" to a permanent judicial commission.

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